

## Akbar's Dream

Phiroze Vasunia

“Some women are so—well, ungenerous and snobby about Indians, and I should feel too ashamed for words if I turned like them, but—and here’s my difficulty—there’s nothing special about me, nothing specially good or strong, which will help me to resist my environment and avoid becoming like them. I’ve most lamentable defects.

“That’s why I want Akbar’s ‘universal religion’ or the equivalent to keep me decent and sensible. Do you see what I mean?”

Adela Quedsted, in E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924)

One of the fundamental challenges faced by British Orientalists in India in the last quarter of the eighteenth century was the “theoretical problem” of Indian civilization.<sup>1</sup> The languages, literatures, religions, and traditions of South Asia were of an antiquity that stretched back centuries or even millennia. Since the classical Greek and Latin authors had offered some vague knowledge of “India”, its people, and customs, the Indians were not quite savages or a people without history. The Indians of South Asia could not be assimilated to the “natural man” of the New World or the aboriginal inhabitants of the regions we now term Australia and New Zealand; nor could the Indians be likened to the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa. Everywhere the Orientalist turned, he found evidence of rituals, texts, and theologies that seemed to hint at profound histories, elaborate schematizations, metaphysical sophistication, and complex mechanisms for social transmission. There were large numbers of Indian tribes, hill-dwellers, and villagers who seemed not to share in the traditions of their Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim compatriots, but their presence only sharpened, if by contrast, the deep-rooted and literate traditions that were manifest across the subcontinent. To this challenge the Orientalists responded by comparing Indian culture to other historical traditions of more or less familiarity such as the Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic, or to traditions that were only now beginning to come under sustained scrutiny in Europe such as the Persian and Chinese. Comparison was a way of “synchronizing” Indian civilization with the cultures of old Europe, Graeco-Roman antiquity, and the Bible, on the one hand, or with other Eastern nations, on the other. It was central to the Orientalist task of understanding Indian history, arriving at a thorough knowledge of its religious texts and monuments, and comprehending its linguistic diversity and ethnologic complexity.

If comparison was a central feature of the early Orientalist response to the problem, it remained a vital part of colonial British engagement with India over the next century and a half, effectively until the end of colonial rule. Comparison of this type—let us call it a mode of colonial engagement—varied across the decades of the British presence in India, of course, and assumed different forms: it was deployed for a number of diverse functions, motivated for a variety of reasons, and served a range of ideological attachments. It was sometimes marked explicitly as comparison, as in

---

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill, and Geoffrey Lloyd for the invitation to the Sawyer Seminars on cross-cultural comparatism and for asking me to contribute to this volume. Participating in the seminars in Cambridge has been an intensely stimulating experience and has immensely deepened my understanding of comparative study. I am also deeply grateful to Javed Majeed and Avril Powell for their help with Urdu materials from the nineteenth century.

the work of Sir William Jones, or in the examinations administered to candidates for the Indian Civil Service, but frequently not signalled thus at all, as in the policy documents of scores of colonial administrators. The early Orientalists were capable of dazzling linguistic feats, and the findings of comparative philology were occasionally used as a model and applied to other fields of enquiry; but comparison was not just focussed on language or philology and frequently extended to areas as diverse as law, religion, economics, anthropology, history, and race science. We need only mention the names of James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Macaulay, Friedrich Max Müller (though he was not born a Briton), Henry Maine, and the Earl of Cromer, apart from Jones, in order to give some sense of the kinds of thinkers, intellectuals, and politicians to whom comparison was important at some point or another. One scholar has gone so far as to assert that the comparative philology that was practised so assiduously by Jones “developed into an epistemic habit of the colonial state in the subsequent decades and saturated the daily business of running the empire”.<sup>2</sup> Comparison was widespread in colonial India and far-reaching in impact, at any rate, and it profoundly shaped the very nature of colonial modernity.

Comparative writing about India was frequently accompanied by reflection on the nature of comparative work, how best to practise it, and its limitations, advantages, and risks. We find this in responses to Jones’ work no less than in Jones’ own lectures and discourses. The *History of British India* (1817), by James Mill, not only seeks to correct Jones, whom it repeatedly invokes, but also offers another approach “to the construction of idioms in which cultures could be compared, contrasted and criticised”.<sup>3</sup> Mill provides an instance of the critical self-awareness that marked many colonial comparisons even if in his own work he tends to denigrate Hindus and Hinduism, misconstrue the rôle of Islam in the Mughal Empire, and interpret matters too freely in the terms of the new Utilitarianism. He was not exceptional in the methodological self-consciousness he showed on the topic of comparison. Across the colonial era, this critical self-reflexiveness was supple and rigorous and often surprisingly open to the possibility that its author might be simplifying what was in reality a complicated situation. Such is the case, for example, in the submissions made to the authorities by the British and Indian contributors to the vast Linguistic Survey of India (1894–1928) who frequently appear to complicate and even undermine official colonial frameworks for the classification of native languages.

Following Geoffrey Lloyd and others, we may term this second-order activity ‘comparatism’.<sup>4</sup> As Lloyd remarks, comparatism prompts one to reflect on the values and limits of comparative activity, the parameters within which it is carried out, and its potential for opening up new understandings of other peoples and cultures. Various factors affect the practice of comparatism in a colonial context and, as Lloyd says, ‘the hidden and sometimes not so hidden agenda that comparatism often serves’.<sup>5</sup> An interesting situation arises when the element of historical memory is injected into comparatism, as happens, for example, when nineteenth-century practitioners of comparison cast their eyes back at older comparative activity in India. The passage of time and the framework of empire are precisely the factors we need to bear in mind when we consider how Max Müller and Tennyson look back to Akbar, the Mughal emperor, who compared several religions in order to devise a new faith in the sixteenth century.

#### *Akbar in the Sixteenth Century*

Akbar reigned from 1556 to 1605. His interest in religious disputation dates at least to 1575 if not earlier, and by the 1580s he was already straying from the full range of Islamic observances in court.<sup>6</sup> In 1575, when he was thirty-three, Akbar built an Ibadat Khana, or House of Worship, near his palace complex in Fatehpur Sikri. “Throughout his residence in Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar engaged in a systematic study and discussion of comparative theology and religion.”<sup>7</sup> The Emperor held conversations, at first with Sunni scholars and later with Shia as well, on matters of belief, doctrine, faith, worship, and religion in general. He participated in these gatherings on Thursday nights and sometimes continued them on Friday afternoons. These

meetings later took place not just in the Ibadat Khana but also in the palace, and there were reports of clandestine or night-time (to avoid the ire of the *ulema*) debates and consultations. Within a few years, by the autumn of 1578, Akbar invited non-Muslim priests and scholars, including Hindus and Parsis, to join the debates, and in 1583, he was in conversation with Jain monks. The first Jesuit mission led by Robert Acquaviva arrived at the Mughal court in February 1580, and was followed by further missions, the third and last of which was led by Jerome Xavier and which arrived in 1594. According to Antonio Monserrate, who accompanied the first mission, Akbar was already in the early 1580s “not in the habit of saying the customary Musulman prayers at the times appointed by Muhammad, and did not observe the month’s fast which is called Ramadan”.<sup>8</sup> Abu’l Fazl, Bada’uni, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi as well as Monserrate all give the impression that Akbar for all intents and purposes had become an apostate from Islam.

The other side of apostasy was the Emperor’s openness to religions in general, his policy of toleration, his abolition of the *jizya* or poll tax on Hindu pilgrims, and his exploration of a new religion in the Din-i Ilahi (“Divine Faith”, in Persian). Chris Bayly writes, “This search for dispassionate knowledge about human faith constituted a kind of *spiritual anthropology*, a blending of the inheritance of Greek observation and enlightened Islamic sentiment.”<sup>9</sup> Abu’l Fazl’s works records the details not just of revenues and court regulations but also of Hindu traditions, practices, and texts, of Hindu cosmology and ancient theories of kingship. Much of this was motivated by a desire to understand the Empire’s subjects but such treatises also show the interest of the court and Emperor in cultures beyond the Islamic. Abu’l Fazl makes a great deal of Akbar’s library, which was said to contain works in Hindi, Persian, Greek, Kashmiri, and Arabic. He also says that the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* were translated from Sanskrit into Persian in the reign of Akbar, along with a range of texts in Sanskrit and other languages. All this points to an inclination to comprehend the texts and traditions of the empire’s Hindu (and non-Hindu) subjects and to assimilate Sanskrit knowledge systems into the decision-making apparatus in the Mughal court. The culture of comparatism that Akbar encouraged went beyond religious discussions and into other spheres of learning.

There are pragmatic and political explanations for Akbar’s turn away from Islam, his turn to a supposed liberal regime of tolerance and innovation, and his patronage of translation and artistic activities. He may have been a deeply spiritual individual and a seeker of divine knowledge, but at the same time he was the ruler of a vast empire of diverse peoples. Kingship for him, in Bayly’s words, “was an office directed to knowledge of God and the world”.<sup>10</sup> Akbar was attempting to define “a broader, more flexible, notion of the political community of early modern India” than was offered by his predecessors.<sup>11</sup> It was inevitable that such an endeavour would bring him into conflict with the *ulema*, but the political and personal benefits to him were immense. There are numerous considerations that we can barely touch on here, and which have been extensively debated by scholars, but suffice to say that Akbar’s cultivation of Hindus, Jains, Jesuit priests, Parsis, and others brought tangible advantages to the imperial court and strengthened its ideological investments. The Emperor’s marriage to a Rajput princess from Jodhpur, Jodha Bai, helped him build military and political alliances with the Rajput kingdoms, for example. The Mughals may have supported translations of Sanskrit texts into Persian but their intellectuals were not above judging and criticizing these texts or finding them inferior to canonical writings from their own tradition. Besides, these religious and translation activities were part and parcel of the Mughal administration’s imperial strategy. Its success may be gauged not just by the spread of Akbar’s dominions in India but by the statements of grief left by Hindu contemporaries at the news of his death.<sup>12</sup> As Audrey Truschke observes, “Multiculturalism was foundational to the imperial dispensation and ought to be carefully analyzed and treated prominently in future accounts of the Mughal state.”<sup>13</sup>

One reason why the Emperor was esteemed in the era of Warren Hastings and later in British colonial India may be that the Mughal Empire under Akbar and his successors acquired knowledge about India, its peoples, religions, languages,

literatures, and traditions “in much the same way as the future British conquerors were to do”.<sup>14</sup> These efforts were not entirely original to Akbar nor did they end with him, but he appeared to exemplify the most accomplished and liberal phase of them. In this sense, the early British administrators of India can be said to have been enamoured of Akbar because he achieved more or less what they were themselves hoping to achieve during their own rule: control and command of the subcontinent through a deep knowledge of its people no less than through political and military exploits. By the beginning of the twentieth century, when the nature of colonial rule was substantially different from what it used to be in the eighteenth century, British views on Akbar’s motives also hardened in some circles.<sup>15</sup> Vincent Smith, who was a historian of India and the author of a biography (1917) of the Mughal Emperor, said of the Din-i Ilahi: “The whole scheme was the outcome of ridiculous vanity, a monstrous growth of unrestrained autocracy . . . The Divine Faith was a monument of folly, not of his wisdom.”<sup>16</sup>

Another reason for Akbar’s appeal, at any rate, may lie in the welcome he extended to Europeans and to Christianity. André Wink writes, “His fondness for Europeans remained a subject of conversation in Mughal India throughout the seventeenth century. It was, to say the least, remarkable in a country where to some Muslims even to hear the name of Christian or Frank was hateful, and blue eyes were regarded as a sign of hostility to the Prophet.”<sup>17</sup> A large number of Europeans were in his employ. According to Father Monserrate, the Emperor “professed to believe in the stories of Christ’s miracles and had pictures of Christ, Mary, Moses, and Muhammad installed in his dining hall. He prostrated himself on the ground in adoration of Christ and his mother and told his sons to do the same.”<sup>18</sup> The vividness of this narrative is remarkable, but in truth the Jesuits said they were disappointed that Akbar failed to convert to Christianity. The often sympathetic accounts left by the Jesuits and other European travellers who visited Akbar’s court would have attracted British readers to the Emperor and his policies, despite any sectarian prejudice on the part of Anglicans.

*Akbar the comparatist: Friedrich Max Müller*

“The Emperor Akbar,” writes Friedrich Max Müller, “may be considered the first who ventured on a comparative study of the religions of the world . . .”<sup>19</sup> Max Müller, who famously extended the method of comparative philology to the study of religion, grants this privileged place to Akbar in his *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, which is based on four lectures that he delivered at the Royal Institution in 1870. He evidently believes in the importance of his elevation of Akbar since he not only refers to the ruler in his first lecture but also devotes an appendix to him in which he quotes extensively from Persian sources on Akbar’s interest in non-Islamic religions as well as Islam.

This connection between Akbar and comparative study is significant, given what we know of colonial forms of knowledge, and can be interpreted in several ways. In the first place, Max Müller may be alluding to a contemporary ruler in his remarks about an old ruler of India. We might think of Queen Victoria as the equivalent of the Mughal ruler, but Max Müller does not quite present her as a second Akbar. Victoria herself was not proclaimed Empress of India until the passing of the Royal Titles Act in 1876, after the lectures, and her Indian title, *Kaisar-i-Hind*, was a contemporary fabrication that had only vague associations with the titles of Mughal monarchs from the preceding era. Perhaps the allusion to Victoria would have come more naturally to Max Müller if he had delivered his lectures after 1876. Perhaps he is implying that comparative study calls for a royal benefactor. Or perhaps he is suggesting that the colonial state might have use for a comparative approach to religion (the state clearly sought to remain informed on beliefs and practices across the range of religions in South Asia). Certainly, the colonial apparatus had facilitated the kind of approach that Max Müller advocated: Orientalists in the pay of the East India Company and elsewhere had translated many historical texts and vastly increased the number of books that might interest a historian of religion. Max Müller makes the point that the number of holy books available even to the Emperor of India

in the sixteenth century was small in relation to the books now available to the diligent scholar. The modern European scholar had at his disposal the Vedas, the Avesta, all the important Buddhist texts, the writings of Confucius and Lao Tzu, and missionary accounts of “the belief of African and Melanesian savages”; he had access to a wider range of sacred texts than anyone at any earlier moment in history.<sup>20</sup> The time was, therefore, ripe for the comparative study of religion, a study that would exceed anything dreamed of by Akbar long ago in Agra.

The reference to Akbar is also notable in so far as the Mughal emperor’s interest seems to conflict with the kind of practice that Max Müller has in mind, namely, a study that parallels comparative philology and that is “scientific” in the modern sense. The point about philology is important for the nineteenth-century author: he says that, just as the comparative study of language once led to innumerable advances in philology, so the comparative study of religion will further scientific understanding. “I feel certain that the time will come when all that is now written on theology, whether from an ecclesiastical or philosophical point of view, will seem as antiquated, as strange, as unaccountable as the works of Vossius, Hemsterhuys, Valckenaer, and Lennep, by the side of Bopp’s Comparative Grammar.”<sup>21</sup> Again, the modern scholar has this advantage over previous generations, that the principles of critical scholarship are now known. Critical scholarship approaches a text with care and raises questions of authorship, chronology, biography, source criticism, and the like.<sup>22</sup> Such an approach was not available to Akbar.

It would have been obvious to Max Müller, of course, that the particular historical circumstances of Akbar’s reign were very different from the circumstances of his own day, and he would not have expected to investigate religions in the terms of the nineteenth century. The significant issue for Max Müller is comparison, and for him, the fruits of comparison are not in question: “What is gained by comparison?—Why all higher knowledge is acquired by comparison, and rests on comparison.”<sup>23</sup> For him, Akbar offers an historical example of someone who presumes to compare religions, and from this perspective, the emperor’s method and motives are arguably of less value than the worth of the precedent he sets. If Akbar could carry out his act of comparison with relatively few texts and with representatives of only a few religions, then surely the modern scholar, with vast resources at his disposal and all the recent gains of scholarly enquiry, could undertake a more widespread and rigorous analysis than that attempted by an Indian ruler of the sixteenth century.

In the appendix to his first lecture, Max Müller quotes from Abu’l Fazl (*Ain-i-Akbari*) and Bada’uni (*Muntakhab al-tawarikh*) and presents a brief extract from the *Dabistan* (the authorship is uncertain). Max Müller takes all his passages from the recent translation by Heinrich Ferdinand Blochmann (1838–1878), a German scholar who spent much of his life in Calcutta. Blochmann prepared an edition (1867–1877) of the Persian text of Abu’l Fazl’s work and wrote the first (1868) of three volumes of an English translation of the *Ain-i-Akbari* (this first volume also contains extracts from Bada’uni and the *Dabistan*). Abu’l Fazl’s account is supportive of Akbar, Bada’uni’s critical of the emperor’s turn away from Islam, while the *Dabistan* also gives an account of Akbar’s new religion. These are the primary Indo-Persian sources for Akbar’s religious innovation.

Max Müller chooses his extracts in such a way as to render a sympathetic portrait of Akbar’s life and religious searching. In effect, he quotes extensively from Abu’l Fazl and presents Akbar as a thinker interested in a variety of traditions and religions, the enemy of zealots and fanatics, and in thrall to the spiritual poetry of many nations. It was in his reign and at his instruction that the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* were translated into Persian, the language of the Mughal court. The extracts from Bada’uni, though an unsympathetic witness, also affirm the emperor’s spirituality. As Max Müller observes, “even the hostile statements of Bada’uni and his party only confirm the impression of Akbar’s character produced by the friendly account of Abufazl.”<sup>24</sup> The following, for instance, is Bada’uni’s description of how Akbar came to abandon Islam and formulate his synthetic religion, the Din-i Ilahi.

Night and day people did nothing but enquire and investigate; profound points of science, the subtleties of revelation, the curiosities of history, the wonders of nature, of which large volumes could only give a summary abstract, were ever spoken of. His Majesty collected the opinions of every one, especially of such as were not Muhammadans, retaining whatever he approved of, and rejecting everything which was against his disposition, and ran counter to his wishes. From his earliest childhood to his manhood, and from his manhood to old age, His Majesty has passed through the most various phases, and through all sorts of religious practices and sectarian beliefs, and has collected every thing which people can find in books, with a talent of selection peculiar to him, and a spirit of enquiry opposed to every [Islámitic] principle. Thus a faith based on some elementary principles traced itself on the mirror of his heart, and as the result of all the influences which were brought to bear on His Majesty, there grew, gradually as the outline on a stone, the conviction in his heart that there *were sensible men in all religions, and abstemious thinkers, and men endowed with miraculous powers, among all nations*. If some true knowledge was thus everywhere to be found, why should truth be confined to one religion, or to a creed like the Islám, which was comparatively new, and scarcely a thousand years old; why should one sect assert what another denies, and why should one claim a preference without having superiority conferred on itself.<sup>25</sup>

Bada'uni's text reinforces Max Müller's presentation of Akbar as a seeker of truth, wisdom, and morality wherever it may be found. The words in italics are emphasized by Max Müller and are not italicized in Blochmann's translation. We might surmise that Max Müller draws his reader's attention to them because they conform to his own views and, indeed, they are similar to claims he makes in his writings. Max Müller appears to use Akbar's interest in comparative religion to reaffirm his own agenda, which included the recovery of a common religious ancestry going back to the earliest periods.<sup>26</sup>

Akbar stages a reappearance in the writings of Max Müller in scattered moments here and there, and most notably in his lecture on "The Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893", which was, in fact, delivered, in 1894, in Oxford. The Victorian intellectual speaks with general approval about the Parliament of Religions and says that so diverse a religious gathering had never taken place before. Neither the actions of Ashoka nor the Council of Nicaea are comparable, in his view. He devotes far more time to Akbar's religious consultations than these two potential precedents and is again prepared to praise the ruler for his openness to other religions other than his own and for "great independence of judgement and true honesty of purpose".<sup>27</sup> But Akbar's motive was to found a new religion and he learned about other faiths chiefly for that reason. He also met with resistance from various quarters, was unable to get Brahman priests to reveal their scriptures in full, had to conduct some of his discussions by cover of night, and lacked access to the plenitude of materials available to the modern scholar. The Emperor's gathering of religious authorities could not compete with the congress that had assembled in Chicago, on Max Müller's account, but he nonetheless comes across as a tolerant figure, more tolerant, for example, than his contemporary Henry VIII.

The image of Akbar as an enlightened ruler, a figure who brought together people of varied faiths, had been given a powerful boost early in the period of British rule when Alexander Dow (1735/6–1779) composed his *History of Hindostan* in three volumes. Dow presents Akbar as a virtuous and benevolent ruler, with a "warm and active disposition . . . the glory of the house of Timur, and an example of renown to the Kings of the world".<sup>28</sup> Dow had Deist inclinations and espoused a form of Enlightenment secularism; he admired Akbar for actively comparing religions and seeking rationally to find the best tenets in them. Akbar was rendered into a Deist himself and is said to have "tried to promulgate a rational religion by rational suasion; and in his enlightened rule there was no room for discrimination on religious, national or territorial grounds."<sup>29</sup> On Dow's reading, Akbar transformed the Indian polity, ensured a stable system of government, and surpassed all previous rulers in the sagacity of his administration.

Dow's encomium of Akbar was sufficiently influential that it prompted Warren Hastings, the Governor General of Bengal, to ask Francis Gladwin to translate the *Ain-i-Akbari*, by Abu'l Fazl, into English. The Hastings administration was seeking some continuity with the Mughal era and the "institutes of the Emperor Akbar" was believed to contain "the original constitution of the Mogul empire".<sup>30</sup> Hastings noted, in 1783, that the work would show his administration where it approached "the first principles" of Akbar's state and thus where it might take measures that would be "most familiar to the minds of the people".<sup>31</sup> As Bayly writes, "A political genealogy and a political theory for Anglo-Indian rule began to be written which portrayed an orientalist British Constitution. Akbar became a kind of Indian Edward I, who had healed the religious and racial divisions between his citizens and made 'Hindustan the most flourishing Empire in the World'."<sup>32</sup>

Hastings and the early translators such as Dow and Gladwin were responsible for inventing the idea of a golden age of Mughal history that encompassed Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb. Akbar enjoyed the top place in this re-imagining of Mughal history, for his perceived religious tolerance, military success, and administrative efficiency. Hastings collected miniatures from the Mughal period, including many sketches from Akbar's court, and owned a copy of Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnama* (of which the *Ain-i-Akbari* constituted the third volume).<sup>33</sup> Natasha Eaton writes that Hastings "devised a visual genealogy of the Mughal Emperors, comparing their reigns with the English monarchy and writing brief, biographical notes to accompany their portraits, central being Akbar 'the first confessed emperor of Hindustan, the author of all its political and financial economies . . . a wise, great and noble prince'."<sup>34</sup> Hastings patronized the artist William Hodges, who thought highly of Mughal India and whose depictions of the Mughal period were suffused with pathos and nostalgia. Hodges visited both Akbar's tomb, in Sikandra, and Fatehpur Sikri, in 1783, and one result was "A View of part of the Tomb of the Emperor Akbar at Secundra", an image that invited the viewer to reflect on the ruler's faded glory. Works such as this were evocations of a grand country, now in decay, and also served as justifications of East India Company rule in India. <<image>>



This conception of Akbar as a benevolent despot was the central feature of his subsequent reception in British histories of India. Although James Mill appeared to

be relatively uninterested in developing Akbar's character in his *History of British India* (1817), the next major history of India, by Mountstuart Elphinstone (1841), reinforced the early Orientalist interpretation of Akbar. Elphinstone devotes a great deal of space to Akbar and to his religious policies. By his time, Akbar had been established in British intellectual circles as a tolerant ruler, free of prejudice to other religions, and eager to consult the representatives of diverse faiths. Elphinstone recounts the details of the translations from Sanskrit into Persian, Akbar's interest in Christianity, his conversation with European priests who travelled to Agra from Goa, and the formulation of a new religion. We hear once again of the dialogue between a Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, Jew, Christian, and a "philosopher". In Elphinstone's re-telling of the incident, Akbar listens to them all, finds them wanting, and expresses the view that God should be worshipped on the basis of reason alone and not any revelation. Akbar was represented as the archetypal Enlightenment despot, not bound to any one particular faith, accepting of difference, a champion of literature, philosophy, mathematics, and the arts, and the grand sovereign of "the whole Indian nation".<sup>35</sup>

Max Müller's easy recourse to Akbar as the first person in history to attempt the comparative study of religion can be placed in the context of the former's attempts to combine philology and religion and to arrive at a new understanding of the basic tenets of the world's major religions. Max Müller was looking to find common threads, shared mythological features, and common values across faiths. As we saw, Akbar's motives in comparing religions and in conversing with visiting Jesuit priests were inspired in part by his search for a synthetic religion but also by political considerations.<sup>36</sup> For Max Müller, what mattered was the comparison and not the strategic factors guiding it. Akbar's reputation as a tolerant ruler who consulted widely on the subject of religion made him especially appealing to European scholars looking for examples of such practice, and Max Müller's lifelong devotion to Indian culture meant that he was more likely than most to turn to a figure from Indian history. Yet, Akbar's status in colonial India exceeded that of all other South Asian monarchs, with the possible exception of Ashoka, who lived in the third century BCE, and he was thus bound to attract other writers and intellectuals of the Victorian period.<sup>37</sup> Among those who were unable to resist his appeal was the older Tennyson.

#### *Akbar's Dream: Tennyson*

"Tennyson had been interested in comparative religion throughout his career," Kirstie Blair writes, "and particularly in the common notion that the differing forms of religion might express similar underlying principles."<sup>38</sup> Once again, it was Akbar who prompted a Victorian intellectual to think about comparative religion in a colonial context. The poem "Akbar's Dream", the subject of Blair's discussion, was written by Tennyson in 1891–92 and published in his final collection, entitled *The Death of Oenone, Akbar's Dream, and Other Poems* (1892). Tennyson had been in contact with Max Müller and that Victorian sage, Benjamin Jowett, on the question of religion, and was on friendly terms with both, but especially with Jowett. Max Müller and Jowett also enjoyed a friendship that went back to the 1840s. The chronology of these relationships has been recounted at length by biographers, and we need register only a few of the relevant details in this discussion.<sup>39</sup> These will throw some light on the background to Tennyson's poem and help us understand why scholars read the verses in terms of "turn-of-the-century comparative religion and philology that eventually produced the concept of 'world religions'".<sup>40</sup>

Jowett had been suggesting poetic topics to Tennyson for years, from the 1850s to the end of the poet's life. Tennyson composed a poem "To the Master of Balliol" in which he dedicated "The Death of Oenone" to him. Both had an association with India, and they had lost members of their family there or to illness contracted in the country (in Jowett's case, two brothers; in Tennyson's, a son). Hallam Tennyson's memoir of his father contains a moving account of the death of Lionel, Hallam's brother, and of his devotion to Indian service. Lionel's passing, in April 1886, on the voyage home from Calcutta, "was an overwhelming grief to us, 'a grief as deep as life or thought'".<sup>41</sup> Poetic inspiration is complex and hard to pin down. Yet, if Tennyson's late poems signal a turn to "the spiritual wisdom of the



East”, the incitement could have come not just from within his family but also from Jowett, who “was a major, perhaps the principal, stimulus of Tennyson’s interest in the Orient”.<sup>42</sup> The “Ancient Sage” (1885) is informed by Tennyson’s reading of Lao Tzu, an author whom he took up at Jowett’s suggestion. A little later Jowett seems to have suggested a topic that resonates closely with the theme of “Akbar’s Dream”, for Hallam records that, in 1890, Jowett urged Tennyson to write “on the idea that ‘All religions are one,’ or on ‘The religions of all good men.’”<sup>43</sup>

Tennyson had sought Max Müller’s help with his poem “The Holy Grail”, in 1868, but it was Jowett who seems to have actively encouraged the poet’s later enthusiasm for comparative religion and the works of the early Orientalists.<sup>44</sup> In his younger days, Tennyson had written poems set in the East and read the writings of William Jones.<sup>45</sup> With “Akbar’s Dream”, Jowett “first suggested an Indian subject” to the older Tennyson and remarked to Hallam: “Your father appreciates the East.”<sup>46</sup> Jowett’s mediation can be clarified with some precision. He writes to Hallam in December 1890: “I send books relating to Akbar . . . I rely on your making a study of the books and presenting some of the contents of them in a form which will be available to your Father.’ The books are also mentioned by Hallam in his memoir and include not just the *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abu’l Fazl in Blochmann’s translation but also W. Hunter, *Asiatic Quarterly*, July 1890; volume VI of the *History of India* (1867–1877) by H. Elliott; the *History of India* (1874 edn.) by Elphinstone; and *Asiatic Studies* (1882) by A. Lyall. Jowett evidently kept track of the poem’s composition: on 31 March 1891, he wrote to Hallam, “I am delighted to hear that Akbar makes progress” and on 17 April 1891 “he sent a long letter on the significance of Akbar”.<sup>47</sup> The stream of letters from Jowett continued: in 1892, the year in which “Akbar’s Dream” was published, he wrote to Max Müller: “I have been with Tennyson during the last week and find his mind a good deal occupied with thoughts about universal religion (Please do not mention this). Could you send me for him the volume which I think you got published or received containing an account of the Chinese Buddhist Pilgrims who travelled in India?” Jowett was referring to a review essay in the first volume of *Chips from a German Workshop* (1867) and he added the hope that Tennyson’s poem “might take the form of a Sage or Saint travelling over India, and making reflections on the world and on religion”.<sup>48</sup> Tennyson never published such a poem, but the gist of Jowett’s words is that Tennyson was still thinking about universal religion and contemplating another poem on the topic in relation to India.

The triangular relationship between Jowett and Tennyson and Max Müller is revealing. Tennyson had known Max Müller since 1855, as Lady Tennyson records in her journal, and Max Müller had stayed at Tennyson’s home a few times.<sup>49</sup> Max Müller had read Tennyson’s poems and found *In Memoriam* somewhat melancholy and rather too marked by sorrow and despair.<sup>50</sup> Tennyson himself read out some of his poems to Max Müller on at least one occasion (in 1868).<sup>51</sup> Jowett also wrote about religious matters, of course, and faced strident opposition on theological issues in Oxford for many years.<sup>52</sup> He famously said that the New Testament should be studied “like any other book” and, in later life, he delivered “sermons about the great religions of the world in Balliol College chapel”.<sup>53</sup> Like Max Müller, he had a public profile and was frequently involved in political or national issues. This is the same Jowett, as Simon Goldhill notes, “who articulates as strongly as anyone the connection between university education and public life”, or between Oxford and Empire.<sup>54</sup> He would have been happy for his own ideas about religion or, for that matter, Indian history to be given a prominent platform by a poet of the stature of Tennyson. The underlying sentiments of “Akbar’s Dream” are consistent with the religious views espoused by Jowett if not also by Max Müller.

“Akbar’s Dream” consists largely of a monologue addressed by the Emperor to Abu’l Fazl, the author of the *Ain-i-Akbari*. The poem also comes with the poet’s annotations, including a preliminary note in which Tennyson describes Akbar’s religious policy: “His tolerance of religions and his abhorrence of religious persecution put our Tudors to shame. He invented a new eclectic religion by which he hoped to unite all creeds, castes and peoples: and his legislation was remarkable for vigour, justice and humanity.”<sup>55</sup> The poem is prefaced with an inscription in verse,

by Abu'l Fazl, that Tennyson takes from Blochmann's translation of the *Ain-i Akbari*.<sup>56</sup>

O God in every temple I see people that see thee, and in every language I  
hear spoken, people praise thee.  
Polytheism and Islám feel after thee.  
Each religion says, 'Thou art one, without equal.'  
If it be a mosque people murmur the holy prayer, and if it be a Christian  
Church, people ring the bell from love to Thee.  
Sometimes I frequent the Christian cloister, and sometimes the mosque.  
But it is thou whom I search from temple to temple.  
Thy elect have no dealings with either heresy or orthodoxy; for neither  
of them stands behind the screen of thy truth.  
Heresy to the heretic, and religion to the orthodox,  
But the dust of the rose-petal belongs to the heart of the perfume seller.

The inscription, with its vaguely Sufi sentiment, reaffirms the point that no one religion has a monopoly on the correct approach to divinity. It is, further, significant that Tennyson nowhere uses the word "religion" in his poems and only uses it here, in a quotation from another poem.<sup>57</sup> The word is quoted, twice, to suggest the multiplicity of acceptable paths to God. By using "religion" in such a context, Tennyson is doubtless also suggesting, here and elsewhere in the poem, that the rigid dogma of many Victorian Christians is too limiting or unhelpful and that the Victorians would benefit from a broader conception of Christianity.

The notion that the Emperor is comparing different religions and selecting the best in them is suggested by Akbar, near the beginning of the poem. Akbar speaks to Abu'l Fazl:

While thou art one with me,  
I seem no longer like a lonely man  
In the king's garden, gathering here and there  
From each fair plant the blossom choicest-grown  
To wreath a crown not only for the king  
But in due time for every Mussulmân,  
Brahmin, and Buddhist, Christian, and Parsee,  
Through all the warring world of Hindustan.<sup>58</sup>

The Emperor continues in this vein, as he goes on with his speech in the poem and seeks at all times to maintain a distance from the rigid strictures of orthodoxy. He disdains the fanaticism of Muslim preachers and teachers in his court and speaks of their disapproval of his religious openness. He regrets having forcibly converted Hindus to Islam early in his reign and now states that he permits his subjects to worship whom or what they choose. He thinks that the doctrine "Love thy enemy", disclosed to him by a visiting Christian priest, is a loftier thought than anything that can be found in Islam. He quotes with approval from an Iranian Sufi poet whom the Mullahs detest and upon whom the orthodox cast their filth. Members of his own court and family question his right to re-interpret Islam and ask him caustically whether he has obtained a second Qur'an or been appointed a new Prophet or can work miracles, but he shrugs them off and relies on Reason to guide him to the divine. Castes and creeds, rites and rituals, hold no attraction for him—but he acknowledges that "forms" such as these have their uses and could move the masses to attain a connection with the Infinite. Taking the best from various religions and guided by the principles of truth and tolerance, Akbar seeks to act as a spiritual leader and forge a new "Divine Faith" in order that he might bring together his disparate peoples into one community.

We might readily see how such a poem might derive from a reading in comparative religion and Orientalist scholarship. Yet, the end of the poem reveals the limits to Tennyson's willingness to locate religious tolerance in an Indian context, for the restoration of Akbar's hopes occurs with the arrival of the British. The poem bewails the loss of a universal religion and provides the means for its restitution. Here is the beginning of the Emperor's dream:

Well, I dreamed

That stone by stone I reared a sacred fane,  
 A temple, neither Pagod, Mosque, nor Church,  
 But loftier, simpler, always open-doored  
 To every breath from heaven, and Truth and Peace  
 And Love and Justice came and dwelt therein . . .

In this dream, Akbar then sees the destruction of his work, in his son's reign, but is led to anticipate its revival under the British.

. . . but while I groaned,  
 From out the sunset poured an alien race,  
 Who fitted stone to stone again, and Truth,  
 Peace, Love and Justice came and dwelt therein,  
 Nor in the field without were seen or heard  
 Fires of Súttee, nor wail of baby-wife,  
 Or Indian widow . . .

The British (the "alien race" from the West) abolish the practice of sati, as did Akbar, and return truth, peace, love, and justice to the land. Tennyson may have disdained the narrow Anglicanism of his fellow Victorians and criticized their parochial attitudes to other religions of the world, but it is left to Christian Britons to rebuild the monument of tolerance and openness left by Akbar in India. The British will displace and conquer the remnants of the Mughals who are still around in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and undertake the moral and spiritual renewal of the people in keeping with Akbar's vision. According to Hallam's memoir, Tennyson himself connected "Akbar's Dream" to the idea of "the Christ that is to be" (*In Memoriam*) and of a "Christianity without bigotry".<sup>59</sup> As one critic observes, "In an ecumenically Christian, humanitarian, and federated Empire, Tennyson hailed the temple to replace Akbar's."<sup>60</sup>

It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on the association between the ruler and religion in the poem. The new religion is evidently something created by the Emperor on the basis of his study of different faiths. The authority and sanction for its creation issue from the office of the Emperor, but the ruler is concerned for his subjects and his intentions are good so the chances of an abuse of authority are minimal. As Akbar implies, he moulds forms and rituals and offers them to his people only "With politic care, with utter gentleness". As with Max Müller in his lectures, however, Tennyson seems to be inviting his readers to draw a comparison between Akbar and his own monarch, Victoria. Just as Akbar guarantees religious freedom to his subjects, so Victoria is, by implication, presented as a tolerant ruler who did not force her faith upon her subjects, even if in reality Christian missionaries were happy to promote their religion in India quite aggressively before 1857. In 1858, a year after the Mutiny, Benjamin Disraeli found himself having to negotiate the tension between Victoria as a defender of the Christian faith at home and Victoria as the monarch of a country inhabited by millions of non-Christians, most of whom were hostile to conversion.<sup>61</sup> This was a tension that never went away in colonial India and lasted throughout Tennyson's lifetime. By the time of the poem's composition, Tennyson had moved to a broader conception of Christianity and, legitimately or not, was allusively attaching it to the Queen and Empress. He appears to be writing in opposition to evangelical missionaries who had sought to turn Indians toward the Christian church. The poet in his old age appears to have softened the stance of the Christian imperialism that Victor Kiernan so skilfully evoked in relation to *Idylls of the King*.<sup>62</sup>

In "Akbar's Dream", the ruler who acts as a spiritual teacher to his people and encourages their diverse forms of worship is also cast as the sun. In fact, the poem makes much of the contrast between light and darkness and consistently associates the Emperor with the sun, the light, and the truth. The very first words of the poem, after the historical inscription from Abu'l Fazl, are "Light of the Nations", which is the salutation Abu'l Fazl uses for Akbar. The metaphor is also explained in the poem by the Emperor's enthusiasm for Zoroastrianism, an enthusiasm to which the Mughal sources also attest. In one of his notes, Tennyson quotes from Abu'l Fazl, who observes that Zoroastrians were among those who participated in Akbar's discussions

about religion, and the poem explicitly makes the connection between Akbar and Zoroastrianism.

The sun, the sun! they rail  
 At me the Zoroastrian. Let the Sun,  
 Who heats our earth to yield us grain and fruit,  
 And laughs upon thy field as well as mine,  
 And warms the blood of Shiah and Sunnee,  
 Symbol the Eternal! Yea and may not kings  
 Express Him also by their warmth of love  
 For all they rule—by equal law for all?  
 By deeds a light to men?

Akbar does not dismiss the charge of Zoroastrian worship but instead defiantly repeats the putative connection with the sun and uses the image to talk about the radiant love shown by a king to his people. But the mention of the sun and Zoroastrianism also take the poem's readers to Max Müller and his concept of solar mythology. This last was an idea which Max Müller developed in his work on comparative religion and for which he became notorious in the second half of the nineteenth century.

There is more at stake in the poem than just an allusion to Max Müller's solar mythology. Tennyson deploys solar imagery in the poem and concludes the whole with a brief "hymn to the sun". Hallam in his memoir records Tennyson's attachment to that hymn and quotes his father as saying "I should like . . . to write a long poem in the metre of 'Akbar's Hymn,' it is a magnificent metre."<sup>65</sup> The verses of the hymn to the sun are in trochees of eight feet, and the other poem in *The Death of Oenone*, a volume which deploys a variety of metrical forms, to use the same metre is "Faith". "'Akbar's Dream' threatens the sense of Tennyson's final collection as determinedly and single-mindedly Christian," Blair writes, "as the identical forms used in 'Faith' and 'Hymn to the Sun' suggest that its statement of faith are heterodox rather than orthodox."<sup>66</sup> What Tennyson appears to be saying is that late Victorian Christianity might draw on the findings of comparative religion, seek inspiration in the vision of a Mughal emperor, and arrive at a sense of faith at once broader and less sectarian than the dogmas of the Anglican Communion.

Soon after the publication of Tennyson's poem, Rabindranath Tagore responded to its central claims with sympathy but found the ending, with its glance at Britain's civilizing mission ("From out the sunset poured an alien race . . ."), vain and self-satisfactory. Tagore's response comes in a Bengali essay "Ingrej O Bharatbashi" (1893), itself a text that undertakes a comparison between "The Englishmen and the Indians".<sup>67</sup> The essayist offers a heartfelt examination of the status of Indians under British rule and writes that the abject state of Indians is partly the result of their own doing and partly of English (Tagore's Bengali term corresponds to "English" rather than "British") attitudes and behaviour. The theme that Tagore develops at length is the English refusal to *love* Indians. Tagore's conception of the love that the English ought to feel for Indians varies in the essay, and at one point he even likens the Indian nation to a woman who is unloved by her foreign husband. Tagore finds Tennyson's poem more promising than the views espoused by colonials in India but thinks the poem is, at the same time, excessively generous about the contribution made by the English. They have attempted to rebuild the temple of Akbar's dream, he says, but it is not quite right to state that truth, peace, justice, and love have made it their dwelling since "Love, the god of all gods, has not yet been installed".<sup>68</sup> Love is absent from English policy in India, Tagore writes, whereas it was love that made Akbar try to unite the whole of India and its peoples, Hindu, Muslim, and other. The English claim not to meddle with religious practice in India, but that is a political consideration for them, and they have worsened the divide between Hindus and Muslims by not acting out of love in their policies. Tagore implies that the reference to the English near the end of the poem is the voice of a poet "vainly bragging" and that the poet's note of "self-aggrandizement" runs counter to the spirit of love that Akbar showed.<sup>69</sup>

Tagore's reading of the poem runs counter to the aspirations that Jowett and Tennyson himself appear to have expressed. Tennyson's hope for unity and harmony is undercut by the criticism, made by Tagore, that the poem potentially exacerbates the division between the English and Indians and that Tennyson's fellow countrymen have sharpened the antagonism between Hindus and Muslims. The poet's vision may be of truth, peace, justice, and love for all, but such an ambition is debased by British policy in the very lands over which Akbar once ruled. Tagore writes, "There is nothing more humiliating than begging for love out of necessity", and he blames the English for embarrassing him and forcing him to ask for their love.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps another way of stating Tagore's complaint would be to point out that, in his view, the appropriate comparison for Tennyson ought not to have encompassed the religious toleration of Akbar and the Tudors but rather Akbar's rule and English rule in India.

#### *Akbar's Dream in Nineteenth-century India*

The memory of Akbar and the Mughal period remained in circulation in North India, and the broad outlines of his rule were never forgotten among Muslim, Hindu, and other populations. Persian remained in wide currency until the early years of the nineteenth century, and Persian sources such as Abu'l Fazl and Bada'uni would have been familiar to numerous readers in North India and elsewhere.<sup>69</sup> Stories of Akbar and his Hindu minister Birbal circulated as popular literature for generations and are still widely recounted in India.<sup>70</sup> Akbar makes a strange appearance in the *Bhavishya Purana*, in which he perhaps attains his "apotheosis in popular religious literature".<sup>71</sup>

When the child was born, a Voice in the Sky said: 'This is a miraculous child; he holds power over destiny. Neither earlier did he follow the violent Paisacha ways, nor will he do so now. That's why, O Homayu, your son will be called Akbara. He who had twenty famous disciples, it is that Mukunda who has been born in your house.'<sup>72</sup>

The Sanskrit text, which is difficult to date, contains older material from 500 to 1200 CE and newer material from the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Akbar is the only Muslim king after whom a whole section is named, in this case of 97 verses, the *Akbar Badshah Varnan*, and indeed, according to C. M. Naim, "the only Muslim king so honoured [i.e. with entry into paradise] in a pan-Indian Hindu scriptural text".<sup>73</sup> As this text indicates, knowledge of Akbar at a popular, religious level continued to remain widespread among the inhabitants of northern India into the eighteenth or nineteenth century. The Emperor Akbar would have been pleased with the mention of reincarnation, since he appears to have acquired a belief in metempsychosis as the result of his religious discussions. The text is, perhaps, wittily alluding to Akbar's un-Islamic interest in reincarnation and to his reputed enthusiasm for many Hindu philosophies and slyly dressing him up in Hindu garb.

Against these representations of the emperor, one of the surprising features of the encounter between Akbar and the Jesuits is that a detailed memory of the debates was gradually eroded and seems to have been lost for a significant period. This erosion of historical memory is notable since the debates were one of the few instances in the early modern period when a largely Muslim court debated religious matters with European Christian interlocutors at length.<sup>74</sup> The loss appears to have afflicted the Indian Muslim as well as the Christian world, though perhaps this is the less startling when one realizes that the most detailed accounts of the discussions were rendered by the visiting Europeans and not by Indian authors writing in Persian. Avril Powell says, "For, over the next two hundred years, the 'memory' of these encounters, though preserved in the Jesuit archives, was not transmitted to other Christian circles, and was lost altogether, it seems, within the Indian Muslim world."<sup>75</sup> Ignorance of the debates between the Emperor and the Jesuits was particularly acute among Indian Muslims in northern India during the early years of the nineteenth century. When a Protestant missionary and a learned Indian Muslim engaged in a *munazara*, or public debate on religion, in 1833, the Indian side appeared to have little sense that similar debates might be said to have taken place in the court of Akbar in the late sixteenth century. This example of cultural amnesia is the more remarkable given that there was still a Mughal court and a Mughal emperor in Delhi. The last

Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was removed by the British from the throne after the Mutiny of 1857. It was only after the mid-nineteenth century that the Indian ulema began to recover the details of the encounter between Akbar and the Jesuits, and it was only now that they came to realize that some of the arguments they were being forced to make against Christianity (about the Trinity, for example, or the status of the Prophet Muhammad) had been made before in the *darbar* of the Mughal Emperor. This recovery was underway by the end of the nineteenth century thanks to “a spate of publishing, usually in Arabic but sometimes through translation into Urdu, of earlier refutations of Christianity”.<sup>76</sup> Yet, prior to the mid-nineteenth century, the details and arguments expressed in the disputations between Akbar and the Jesuits appear to have fallen into oblivion among Indian Muslims.

We might reframe this chronology and say that these disputations were re-emerging in a little more detail among speakers of Urdu in India at roughly the same time that Max Müller was delivering his lectures and Tennyson was composing his poem in Britain. Not all were drawn to the ruler: some regarded him as an apostate or insufficiently Muslim, while others thought his achievements were exaggerated to show up the poor quality of earlier Hindu rulers. But in this context it is worth pointing to the contrasting uses made of Akbar’s deliberations by Indian and British authors. The Urdu authors drew on the structure of the Mughal arguments in order to combat evangelical advocates of Christianity. They were on the defensive against zealous proselytizers. Many of these preachers had the support of the colonial machinery and they shared Christian backgrounds with many if not most colonial administrators. Their Indian respondents were using Akbar’s debates not to advocate universal religion but to protect their own practice of Islam, and thus their adoption of the debates that took place in Mughal Agra was at odds with the religious comparatism or the conception of universal religion espoused by Max Müller and Tennyson.

The conflict between tradition and modernity raised by the debates takes an intriguing turn in the case of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s edition of the *Ain-i Akbari*. Syed Ahmad himself lived in Agra for three years (1839–1841) and then moved to Fatehpur Sikri, where he set up residence in Akbar’s old *khwabgah* or bedchamber.<sup>77</sup> Naim writes, “One can easily imagine him looking at the dimly visible paintings and thinking of the Emperor who had commissioned them, and who once had his most private moments—with wives and scholars alike—in that room.”<sup>78</sup> Perhaps so. At any rate, Syed Ahmad was sufficiently interested in the emperor and his historical legacy that he edited *Ain-i Akbari* in three volumes, the first and third of which appeared in 1855–1856 (work on the second was affected by the Mutiny). In his biography of Syed Ahmad, Altaf Husain Hali writes that the edition “was a real public service” and praises the editor for “presenting the public with a fine record of the exploits of a renowned Muslim sovereign by a famous Muslim writer”.<sup>79</sup>

Syed Ahmad’s edition of *Ain-i Akbari* did not meet with universal acclaim. Ghalib, the pre-eminent Urdu poet of the nineteenth century, remained unimpressed by Abu’l Fazl’s work and by the edition. His critique, in Persian verse, is a not-so-subtle rebuke to Syed Ahmad for seeking to revive an unappealing and antique tome. The insult was particularly pungent given that Ghalib was asked to write a *taqriẓ* (an admiring preface) to the edition by Syed Ahmad, who instead received “a short Persian poem castigating the *Ai’n-e Akbari*, and by implication, the imperial, sumptuous, literate and learned Mughal culture of which it was a product”.<sup>80</sup>

Good news my friends, this ancient book’s door  
Is now open, because of the Syed’s grace and fortune,

The eye began to see, the arm found strength  
That which was wrapped in ancient clothes,  
now put on a new dress.

And this idea of his, to establish its text and edit the *A’in*  
Puts to shame his exalted capability and potential,

He put his heart to a task and pleased himself  
And made himself an auspicious, free servant.

One who isn't capable of admiring his quality  
Would no doubt praise him for this task,

For such a task, of which this book is the basis  
Only an hypocrite can offer praise.

I, who am the enemy of pretence  
And have a sense of my own truthfulness,

If I don't give him praise for this task  
It's proper that I find occasion to praise.

I have nothing to say to the perverse  
None know what I know of arts and letters,

In the whole world, this merchandise has no buyer.  
What profit could my Master hope from it?

It should be said, it's an excellent inventory  
So what's there to see that's worth seeing?

And if you talk with me of Laws and Rules  
Open your eyes, and in this ancient halting-place

Look at the Sahibs of England.  
Look at the style and practice of these,

See what Laws and Rules they have made for all to see  
What none ever saw, they have produced.

Science and skills grew at the hands of these skilled ones  
Their efforts overtook the efforts of the forebears.

This is the people that owns the right to Laws and Rules  
None knows to rule a land better than they,

Justice and Wisdom they've made as one  
They have given hundreds of laws to India.

After continuing in this vein for several verses, the poet adds these lines:

Well, if you speak of its style, it's good  
No, it's much better than all else that you seek

But every good always has a better too  
If there's a head, there's also a crown for it.

Don't regard that Generous Source as niggardly  
It's a Date-Palm which drops sweet light, like dates.

Worshipping the Dead is not an auspicious thing  
And wouldn't you too think that it's  
no more than just words?<sup>81</sup>

As Faruqi observes, with a glance at T. S. Eliot, the poem "makes the pastness of the past extremely clear".<sup>82</sup> Abu'l Fazl's account of Akbar and the great period of Mughal history are centuries in the past, the poem says, and even the polish of his prose is insufficient reason to devote such attention to the text. The future lies with the

British, who excel at science and bring technology to India. They appear to be sound rulers and it is they who have devised laws and who have introduced modern legislation as well as modern science to the subcontinent. As if in anticipation of Tagore, and in opposition to him, Ghalib writes that Indians should turn toward the British and acknowledge the “justice and wisdom” of the colonial administrators. Ghalib does not seek to return to the court of Akbar and his dream of a universal religion.<sup>83</sup> He effectively suggests the British have moved so far beyond Akbar, whom they initially sought to replace, that they now far surpass the Mughal emperors and serve as the harbingers of a new modernity.<sup>84</sup>

Ghalib’s indifference to Akbar does not correspond to the interest taken in the Mughal ruler by historians in India. The views of liberal Indian historians in the nineteenth century have been well explored by Bayly. In his reading, the consensus that seems to emerge by the end of the nineteenth century is that the period of Muslim rule led to despotism and the decline of the social fabric. Some historians make a concession to Akbar since he was thought to have “worked with the grain of Hindu institutions and had incorporated indigenes into government, unlike the British”, but others underline “only the destructive features of Mughal rule”.<sup>85</sup> Among the later historians, one who is favourable to Akbar is M. G. Ranade, who, in the speech he delivers, in 1899, to the Indian National Social Conference, praises the emperor’s tolerance and his attempts to unify India.<sup>86</sup>

A favourable attitude to the Mughal period is adopted by some Muslim historians in the nineteenth century. Muhammad Zaka ‘ullah (1832–1910) claims that Indian civilization improved with the advent of Muslim rule; he portrays Akbar as “the most benevolent, brilliant, and tolerant” of the Mughals and is sympathetic toward the emperor against the ulema.<sup>87</sup> Zaka ‘ullah also defends Aurangzeb, who was often depicted as a religious fanatic by British and Indian historians.<sup>88</sup> One of the most extensive treatments of Akbar comes in the work of Muhammad Husain Azad (1830–1910), who took twelve years to write his text, which was published in 1898. “This book, *The Court of Akbar (Darbār-e akbarī)*, grew into a massively long and extravagant paean to Akbar for his religious tolerance and other qualities. It was colorful, vivid, anecdotal, idealizing, repetitive, full of long authorial asides—and so seductively written that it won immediate popularity and remains a favorite today.”<sup>89</sup> Azad told Syed Ahmad that the ghost of Abu’l Fazl and others had dictated the work to him.

### Conclusion

Within India and beyond, the memory of Akbar’s comparative activities recurs in divergent ways in the nineteenth century. Max Müller’s understanding of Akbar is coloured by eighteenth-century British conceptions of the ruler as an acceptable and efficient predecessor with whom Britons in India could seek to claim some degree of continuity. The idea that Enlightenment thinkers looked favourably on benevolent despots was promoted especially in the nineteenth century,<sup>90</sup> and this offers one explanation for the return of an Enlightenment reading of Akbar in the second half of that century. Earlier, Warren Hastings and the administrators of the East India Company were guided by colonial, mercantile, and political pragmatism in their reception of Akbar. Max Müller is looking for a way to champion his theory that the different religions of the world went back to a common source, and in this pursuit he finds a suitable example in the Akbar he inherits from the eighteenth century. Max Müller’s reading of Akbar is also informed by his own reflections on comparative religion, comparative philology, and Indo-European studies, and Hastings and Max Müller were evidently motivated to appropriate Akbar for different reasons. But the Mughal emperor’s precedent is sufficiently flexible for him to be taken up and instrumentalized by figures as far apart as the professor of comparative philology as well as the Governor-General of Bengal.

Tennyson’s king is a figure who emerges out of a tradition of generalized Eastern religiosity as well as the Akbar who enjoys a warm reception in eighteenth-century British accounts. One phase of the former tradition is connected with movements such as Theosophy and the Brahmo Samaj and with Victorian interest in



Indian religions, spirituality, and holiness. Tennyson appears to have been guided more by Jowett than by Annie Besant, but certainly his poem about Akbar should be read in the context of a South Asian spirituality that was establishing a presence in Britain. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, two markers of this spirituality are Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, which was published in 1879, and Vivekananda's address to the Parliament of the World's Religions, in Chicago, in 1893. Perhaps a third, and slightly earlier, marker is Victorian attentiveness to Sufism and mysticism, the most well-known instance of which is Edward FitzGerald's version of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. (The first edition appeared in 1859 and was based on a text sent to FitzGerald by Edward Byles Cowell, who came upon the poems in the library of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta.) Akbar was born a Muslim and went on to find sustenance in a mixture of Eastern and Western religions, and not just Buddhism and Hinduism, so he could not be connected in any easy fashion to Arnold or Vivekananda. But what makes him attractive to poets and intellectuals such as Tennyson and Jowett is precisely his Indian origin and the fact that his enquiries seem to steer him away from established religion and toward a new, syncretic path to the divine. He is one instance of an Indian ruler who seems to affect a transnational and cosmopolitan spiritual outlook and, in this guise, he also anticipates the later gurus and holy men who emerge from an Indian context and find acceptance in the West.

The responses to Akbar in nineteenth-century Indian literature can be set alongside the treatment of the emperor in the writings of Max Müller and Tennyson. A folkloric memory of the ruler, and of his minister Birbal, survive into the nineteenth century, but a precise account of the disputations that Akbar had in court seems not to be in widespread circulation in the first half of the nineteenth century in Indian languages. By the second half of the century, an awareness of the emperor's debates is more widely attested, the *Ain-i-Akbari* is translated into Urdu, and modern Indian historians begin to write about the Mughal ruler. These depictions vary and should not be reduced to a single type, as the *contretemps* between Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Ghalib illustrates, but it is notable that the historians' view of Akbar is not far removed from the earlier conception of a liberal and tolerant sovereign, although the aims, motivations, and affinities of the writers may differ. In this sense, even the later Indian historical view of Akbar as a liberal and tolerant ruler is, to a significant extent, the creation of eighteenth-century British writing.

Already by the second half of the nineteenth century, there is a gap of some 250 to 300 years between Akbar and his observers, and the analyses of these writers are affected by time, distance, and fading social memories. Many of them are not seeking to make overt comparisons but rather are fascinated by the comparison practised by Akbar in the sixteenth century. (Max Müller is a notable exception who both makes religious comparisons and is fascinated by Akbar.) For some of these writers, Akbar's act of religious comparison was pursued for noble ends and his behaviour receives their approval and even their admiration. Their view is that Akbar would not have arrived at his new synthesis if he was not open to other cultures and if had not thought that other religions had certain features that were superior to Islam and that he might learn something new from an exploration of them. For others, Akbar was a pragmatic and shrewd politician, a ruler whose turn to a new faith was dictated by political considerations rather than personal conviction. For others, Akbar was an apostate, an egomaniac, and a traitor to Islam, while others still, such as Ghalib, show an indifference to Akbar and express the opinion that the emperor's innovations are no longer relevant and belong to the dust-heap of history. Opinions vary, therefore, but the kind of indifference ascribed to Ghalib is a minority view: most commentators take strong positions on Akbar's actions and frequently use him as a springboard on which to launch into disquisitions on religious harmony in India and the rest of the world.

Akbar thus presents himself to nineteenth-century audiences, in Britain and in India, as in some sense already "translated". He is the open-minded ruler who decides to break free of the religion into which he is born and to seek out a new faith. The pattern of this interpretation is set a hundred years earlier. What one makes of the royal transformation depends on one's own proclivities, motivations, and religious

inclinations. Everyone recognizes that something potentially important and even revolutionary happens in Akbar's court, for all the limitations on the experiment imposed by emperor and state, but comparatists in the nineteenth century are scarcely able to arrive at something new or to broaden their horizons solely because of the precedent set by Akbar. Akbar by himself does not inspire anyone to undertake religious comparison or to reject it. To many comparatists in the nineteenth century, however, Akbar offers a path to a tradition of religious revisionism, a claim that is variously adjudicated, historicized, and appropriated. His example stirs up feeling but changes few minds. In this case, comparatism leads not to radically exciting and novel explorations of religion or non-religion but to an entrenchment of existing positions.

<sup>1</sup> See Vinay Dharwadker, "Orientalism and the Study of Indian Literatures", in C. A. Breckenridge and P. van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 158–85, esp. p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> Baidik Bhattacharya, "On Comparatism in the Colony: Archives, Methods, and the Project of *Weltliteratur*", *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 2016), pp. 677–711, p. 679. See also Siraj Ahmed, "Notes from Babel: Toward a Colonial History of Comparative Literature", *Critical Inquiry* 39 (Winter 2013), pp. 296–326.

<sup>3</sup> Javed Majeed, "Comparativism and references to Rome in British imperial attitudes to India", in Catharine Edwards, ed., *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture 1789–1945* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 88–109, at p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> G. E. R. Lloyd, *Analogical Investigations: Historical and Cross-cultural Perspectives on Human Reasoning* (Cambridge, 2015), ch. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd, *Analogical Investigations*, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> S. A. A. Rizvi, *Religious and intellectual history of the Muslims in Akbar's reign: with special reference to Abu'l Fazl (1556–1605)* (New Delhi, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*. The New Cambridge History of India, vol. 1 pt. 5 (Cambridge, 1993), p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> *The commentary of Father Monserrate, S. J., on his journey to the court of Akbar*. Translated from the original Latin by J. S. Hoyland . . . and annotated by S. N. Banerjee (London, 1922), p. 0000.

<sup>9</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 23–24.

<sup>10</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Banarsi Das, *Ardh Kathanak*, ed. and trans. Mukund Lath, *Half a Tale* (Jaipur, 1981). For contemporary Jain responses to Akbar in Gujarat, see Shirin Mehta, "Akbar as Reflected in the Contemporary Jain Literature in Gujarat", *Social Scientist* 20, 9/10 (1992), pp. 54–60; for Rajasthan, see B. L. Bhadani, "The Profile of Akbar in Contemporary Rajasthani Literature", *Social Scientist* 20, 9/10 (1992), pp. 46–53.

<sup>13</sup> Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York, 2016), p. 0000.

<sup>14</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> A sympathetic depiction of the emperor from this period is Rudyard Kipling's poem "Akbar's Bridge", first published in *Limits and Renewals* (1932).

<sup>16</sup> Vincent A. Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul, 1542–1605* (Oxford, 1917), p. 222.

<sup>17</sup> André Wink, *Akbar* (Oxford, 2009), p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Wink, *Akbar*, p. 102. See *The commentary of Father Monserrate*, pp. 29, 52, and 176.

<sup>19</sup> F. Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, Four Lectures delivered at the Royal Institution, with Two Essays on False Analogies, and the Philosophy of Mythology (London, 1873), p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 25.

- <sup>21</sup> Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 22.
- <sup>22</sup> Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, pp. 25–26.
- <sup>23</sup> Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 12.
- <sup>24</sup> Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 80.
- <sup>25</sup> Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, p. 89, quoting from Blochmann, vol. 1.
- <sup>26</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 66–68; Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).
- <sup>27</sup> F. Max Müller, “The Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893”, in *Collected Works of the Right Hon. Professor F. Max Müller*, vol. 18: *Last Essays*, II. Essays on the Science of Religion (New York and Bombay, 1901), pp. 324–345, at p. 328.
- <sup>28</sup> Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan*, 3 vols., p. 0000.
- <sup>29</sup> J. S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India: The Assessment of British Historians* (Calcutta, 1970), p. 18.
- <sup>30</sup> “Minute of the Honourable the Governor-General, on the intended Publication of a Translation of *Ayeen Akberry* by Mr. Francis Gladwin” (2 June 1783), in F. Gladwin, trans., *Ayeen Akbery; or, the institutes of the Emperor Akber* (London, 1800), new edn., p. xiii.
- <sup>31</sup> In Gladwin, *Ayeen Akbery*, p. xiv.
- <sup>32</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 53. The quotation is from Dow, III, xxviii.
- <sup>33</sup> Natasha Eaton, “Hodge’s visual genealogy for colonial India, 1780–95”, in *William Hodges 1744–1797: the Art of Exploration* (London, 2004), pp. 35–42, at p. 36. See also Natasha Eaton, “The Art of Colonial Despotism: Portraits, Politics, and Empire in South India, 1750–1795”, *Cultural Critique* 70 (2008), pp. 63–93.
- <sup>34</sup> Eaton, p. 36. The quotation is taken from the Hastings Papers in the British Library, Add MS. 39,892, f. 80.
- <sup>35</sup> Mounstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, 2 vols. (London, 1841), vol. 2, p. 260.
- <sup>36</sup> See Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York, 2012), ch. 4.
- <sup>37</sup> A popular fictional account of Akbar was published soon after Max Müller’s lectures. *Akbar: An Eastern Romance* (*Akbar, een Oostersche Roman*) appeared in Dutch, in 1872, and was soon translated into German (1877) and English (1879). For the English version, see P. A. S. Van Limburg-Brouwer, *Akbar: An Eastern Romance*. Translated from the Dutch by M. M. With notes and an introductory life of the Emperor Akbar, by Clements R. Markham, C.B., F.R.S. (London, 1879).
- <sup>38</sup> Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford, 2012), p. 189.
- <sup>39</sup> See esp. James C. Livingston, “Tennyson, Jowett, and the Chinese Buddhist Pilgrims”, *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1989), pp. 157–68.
- <sup>40</sup> Joshua King, “Introduction”, in Emma Mason, ed., *Reading the Abrahamic Faiths: Rethinking Religion and Literature* (London, 2015), p. 125.
- <sup>41</sup> *Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir by His Son*, 2 vols. (New York, 1897), vol. 2, p. 322.
- <sup>42</sup> Livingston, p. 163.
- <sup>43</sup> *Memoir*, 2, p. 372.
- <sup>44</sup> *Memoir* 2, pp. 61–62.
- <sup>45</sup> W. D. Paden, *Tennyson in Egypt: A Study of the Imagery in His Earlier Work* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1942).
- <sup>46</sup> *Memoir* 2, p. 388.
- <sup>47</sup> Christopher Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1441.
- <sup>48</sup> Quoted in Livingston, p. 165.
- <sup>49</sup> *Lady Tennyson’s Journal* 0000.
- <sup>50</sup> *The life and letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller*, vol. 1, p. 111.
- <sup>51</sup> *The life and letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller*, vol. 1, p. 356.

<sup>52</sup> See the chapter by Simon Goldhill in this volume.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Hinchliff, John Prest, “Jowett, Benjamin (1817–1893)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004; online edn., January 2006 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15143].

<sup>54</sup> Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity* (Princeton, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> The poem and Tennyson’s endnotes to it are quoted from the edition of Christopher Ricks (*The Poems of Tennyson*, London, 0000), no. 451, pp. 1441–49, which alters the spelling of the first edition in a few places.

<sup>56</sup> Blochmann, p. xxxi: “The ‘Durar ul Manshūr’, a modern Tazkirah by Muhammad ’Askarī Husainī of Bilgrām, selects the following inscription written by ’Abul Fazl for a temple in Kashmīr as a specimen both of Abul Fazl’s writing and of his religious belief. It is certainly very characteristic, and is easily recognized as Abul Fazl’s composition.” Tennyson does not quote the inscription in full; it continues:

This temple was erected for the purpose of binding together the hearts of the Unitarians in Hindústán, and especially those of His worshippers that live in the province of Kashmīr,

By order of the Lord of the throne and the crown, the lamp of creation,  
Sháh Akbar,

In whom the seven minerals find uniformity, in whom the four elements  
attain perfect mixture.

He who from insincere motives destroys this temple, should first destroy his own place of worship; for if we follow the dictates of the heart, we must bear up with all men, but if we look to the external, we find everything proper to be destroyed.

O God, Thou art just and judgest an action by the motive;

Thou knowest whether a motive is sublime, and tellest the king what motives a king should have.

<sup>57</sup> The point is made by King, p. 126.

<sup>58</sup> “Akbar’s Dream”, lines 18–25.

<sup>59</sup> *Memoir*, vol. 1, p. 326.

<sup>60</sup> John McBratney, “Rebuilding Akbar’s “Fane”: Tennyson’s Reclamation of the East”, *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1993), pp. 411–17, p. 415.

<sup>61</sup> *Benjamin Disraeli Letters*, ed. J. A. W. Gunn and M. G. Wiebe, 7 vols. (Toronto, 2004), vol. 7, pp. 230–31n.

<sup>62</sup> Victor G. Kiernan, “Tennyson, King Arthur, and Imperialism”, in R. Samuel and G. S. Jones, eds., *Culture, Ideology and Politics: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm* (London, 1982), pp. 126–48.

<sup>63</sup> *Memoir*, vol. 2, p. 398.

<sup>64</sup> Blair, *Form and Faith*, p. 196.

<sup>65</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, “The Englishmen and the Indians”, translated by Jharna Sanyal, in *South Asian Review* vol. 25, no. 1 (2004), pp. 104–132.

<sup>66</sup> Tagore, “The Englishmen and the Indians”, p. 116.

<sup>67</sup> Tagore, “The Englishmen and the Indians”, p. 117.

<sup>68</sup> Tagore, “The Englishmen and the Indians”, p. 117.

<sup>69</sup> Avril Powell discusses historical writing in the north-west before 1857 and explores which authors are popular sources for the authors/compiler of history textbooks in the 1860s and 1870s: “History textbooks and the transmission of the pre-colonial past in North-Western India in the 1860s and 1870s”, in Daud Ali, ed., *Invoking the Past: The Place of History in South Asia* (Delhi, 1999), pp. 91–133, esp. pp. 96–98.

<sup>70</sup> For nineteenth-century representations of Akbar, see the compositions of authors such as Nakulesvara Vidyabhushana (whose Bengali story appeared in 1898), Mahipatrama Ruparama Nilakantha (Gujarati biography, 1884), Girishchandra Ghose (Bengali drama, 1881), Harimohana Mukhopadhyaya (Bengali novel, 1886), Ganapatarama Rajarama Bhatta (Gujarati drama, 1883), Yajnesvara Vandyopadhyaya (Bengali poem, 1880), Ranggalala Vandyopadhyaya (Bengali poem, 1868), Pratapachandra Ghosha (Bengali novel, 1869), and Romesh Chunder Dutt (Bengali

novel, 3rd edition, 1881). There are also many representations of Birbal in nineteenth-century literature, including in Gujarati, Hindi, and Urdu.

<sup>71</sup> C. M. Naim, "Popular Jokes and Political History: The Case of Akbar, Birbal and Mulla Do-Piyaza", *Economic and Political Weekly* (June 17, 1995), pp. 1456–64.

<sup>72</sup> *Bhavishya Purana*, quoted in Naim, "Popular Jokes and Political History", p. 1460.

<sup>73</sup> Naim, "Popular Jokes and Political History", p. 1460.

<sup>74</sup> Avril A. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Richmond, Surrey, 1993), ch. I.

<sup>75</sup> Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>77</sup> C. M. Naim, "Syed Ahmad and His Two Books Called 'Asar-al-Sanadid'", *Modern Asian Studies* 45, 3 (2011), 669–708, at pp. 9–10.

<sup>78</sup> Naim, "Syed Ahmad", p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Altaf Husain Hali, *Hayat-i-Javed (A Biographical Account of Sir Sayyid)*, trans. K. H. Qadiri and David J. Matthews (Delhi, 1979), p. 45.

<sup>80</sup> Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "From Antiquary to Social Revolutionary: Syed Ahmad Khan and the Colonial Experience", the Annual Sir Syed Memorial Lecture, Aligarh Muslim University, 2006, p. 13. Available online at [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/srf/srf\\_sirsayyid.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/srf/srf_sirsayyid.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> Translation in Faruqi, "From Antiquary to Social Revolutionary", pp. 16–19. The Persian text appears in *Kulliyat-e Ghalib Farsi*, vol. 1, ed. Sayyid Murtaza Husain Fazil Lakhnavi (Lahore, 1967), pp. 314–18.

<sup>82</sup> Faruqi, "From Antiquary to Social Revolutionary", p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> Ghalib, who was not modest, wrote to Bahadur Shah Zafar in 1850: "And why talk of the poets of the Emperor Akbar's day? My presence bears witness that your age excels his." Quoted in Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, eds., *Ghalib: Life and Letters* (London, 1969), pp. 73–74. Ghalib was unable to take his own account of the Mughals past Humayun.

<sup>84</sup> See, in general, P. Hardy, "Ghalib and the British", in Ralph Russell, ed., *Ghalib: The Poet and His Age* (London, 1972).

<sup>85</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 166.

<sup>86</sup> Mahadeva Govind Ranade, *Religious and Social Reform: A Collection of Essays and Speeches* (Bombay, 1902), ch. X ("I am neither Hindu nor Mahomedan"); cf. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, p. 166.

<sup>87</sup> Muhammad Aslam Syed, *Muslim Response to the West: Muslim Historiography in India 1857–1914* (Islamabad, 1988), p. 62.

<sup>88</sup> The comparative merits of Akbar and Aurangzeb were regularly debated in Indian histories and textbooks. For a discussion of Akbar and Aurangzeb in school texts of the late twentieth century (1990), see Avril Powell, "Perceptions of the South Asian past: ideology, nationalism and school history textbooks", in Nigel Crook, ed., *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia* (Delhi, 1995), pp. 190–228, esp. pp. 205–12.

<sup>89</sup> Frances W. Prichett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 42. The work was translated into Hindi by Ramchandra Varma in three volumes (1924–1937).

<sup>90</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Science of Freedom* (New York, 1969; reissued, 1996), ch. 9 and pp. 682–89.